

Municipal Court Judges

Department Description

The Franklin County Municipal Court is established pursuant to section 1901.01 of the Ohio Revised Code and traces its origin to the creation of the Columbus Municipal Court in 1916. The geographic jurisdiction of the court is all of Franklin County and those portions of the City of Columbus that extend beyond the boundaries of Franklin County.

The court has fourteen judges in the General Division and one judge in the Environmental Division. Judges serve six-year terms, unless appointed or elected to fill a vacancy. Annually, they elect one of their peers to serve as the Administrative and Presiding Judge.

The judges preside over civil, criminal, and traffic cases and conduct both jury and non-jury trials. In jury trials, judges interpret the law and the jury determines factual matters. In non-jury trials, by far the more common, judges have the dual role of interpreting the law and determining the facts. The judges also conduct criminal arraignments and preliminary hearings on felony cases; set bond on criminal charges; issue search warrants; and impose sentence when a defendant is found guilty of a traffic or criminal charge. The judges hear civil cases where the amount in controversy is \$15,000 or less, and cases that are transferred from the Small Claims Division to the regular docket of the court.

The jurisdiction and powers of the Environmental Division differ from those of the General Division in several important respects. The Environmental Division has exclusive jurisdiction to enforce local codes and regulations affecting real property, such as fire and building codes. The Environmental Division has injunctive powers, and there is no monetary limit on the cases that fall within the Environmental Division's exclusive jurisdiction.

Each week, a different judge is assigned to the Duty Session to handle a variety of responsibilities, which include applications for search warrants, motions to dismiss filed by the prosecutor, cognovits notes, motions to excuse jurors, probable cause hearings, motions for default judgments filed in unassigned cases, and performing civil wedding ceremonies.

The court administrator is the chief non-judicial officer and oversees the administrative and operational functions of the court pursuant to policies established by the court. The court administrator works on a day-to-day basis with the Administrative and Presiding Judge. The Court Administration Office consists of the court administrator, assistant court administrator, director of finance and administration, human resources manager, and court administration secretary. Functional units within the Court Administration Office include Court Investigation, Volunteer Services, Court-Appointed Counsel, Interpreter Services, Spanish Interpreters, and Vehicle Immobilization.

Direct services are provided to the judges and the court by the following departments or offices: magistrates, court reporters, assignment, jury, judges' and magistrates' bailiffs, service bailiffs, secretaries, and the small claims/dispute resolution program. The largest department is the Department of Probation Services, whose task is to provide the judiciary with a viable sentencing option with the assurance that probationers who are placed in the community receive appropriate direction and management, consistent with public safety. The department consists of regular supervision officers and several specialized probation supervision programs that focus on domestic violence, chemical abuse, multiple OMVI offenders, sex offenders, and probationers with mental health issues. The department also has an investigation unit, community service program, and restitution program, in addition to a support staff of receptionists, transcriptionists, and intake assignment coordinators.

Department Mission

Judiciary - To provide to all equal access, professional, fair, and impartial treatment; timely disposition of cases without unnecessary delay; a just resolution of all court matters; and to safeguard the constitutional rights of all litigants.

Administration - The mission of the employees is to implement the policies and procedures established by the judiciary and the legislature in a professional and dedicated manner, and to ensure accessibility, fairness, accountability, and courtesy in the administration of justice.

Strategic Priorities for 2006

- Engage in an operational and administrative review of current court structure and commit to implement recommended changes.
- Meet the ever-increasing challenge of providing interpreting, translating, and liaison services to the growing number of those who have business with the court for whom English is not their primary language.
- Create a functional human resources program.
- Review and overhaul the payroll, purchasing, and finance operations and commit to staffing these functions appropriately.
- Assess short-term and long-term space needs; find funding to address short-term needs; and formulate strategies to address long-term needs.
- Place emphasis on the importance of attracting, retaining, training, and rewarding qualified staff.
- Secure funding for courtroom renovations.

2006 Budget Issues

- The work release and home incarceration programs that the court previously utilized were operated by the Franklin County Common Pleas Court. Those programs are being closed down. The 2006 budget includes funding for a pilot home incarceration program proposed by the Municipal Court in an effort to provide alternatives to jail for offenders not posing any threat to the community.
- Fees for professional services continue to be a significant cost and efforts must be ongoing to monitor those expenses. These fees include \$500,000 for court-appointed counsel in cases where the Public Defender's Office has a conflict; \$150,000 for foreign language interpreter fees; \$13,000 for interpreters for the deaf; and \$80,000 for forensic psychological examinations.
- Court costs and fees fund core court functions such as security (approximately \$1.5 million for 2006) and technology (\$585,000).

Budget and Program Summary

DEPARTMENT FINANCIAL SUMMARY					
DIVISION SUMMARY	2003 Actual	2004 Actual	2005 Original Appropriation	2005 Estimated Expenditures	2006 Proposed
Municipal Court Judges	\$ 12,579,008	\$ 12,206,091	\$ 12,552,238	\$ 12,293,828	\$ 13,740,185
TOTAL	\$ 12,579,008	\$ 12,206,091	\$ 12,552,238	\$ 12,293,828	\$ 13,740,185

DEPARTMENT SUMMARY BY CHARACTER					
MUNICIPAL CT JUDGES GENERAL FUND	2003 Actual	2004 Actual	2005 Original Appropriation	2005 Estimated Expenditures	2006 Proposed
Personnel	\$ 10,364,888	\$ 10,261,003	\$ 10,656,115	\$ 10,394,486	\$ 11,574,646
Materials & Supplies	61,731	49,391	59,976	102,158	147,100
Services	1,430,287	1,409,316	1,408,065	1,436,961	1,438,126
Other Disbursements	-	-	-	-	-
Capital	-	-	-	-	-
Transfer				12,500	
TOTAL	\$ 11,856,906	\$ 11,719,710	\$ 12,124,156	\$ 11,946,105	\$ 13,159,872
MUNICIPAL CT JUDGES COMPUTER FUND	2003 Actual	2004 Actual	2005 Original Appropriation	2005 Estimated Expenditures	2006 Proposed
Personnel	\$ 113,440	\$ 174,805	\$ 127,932	\$ 126,136	\$ 194,013
Materials & Supplies	285,788	72,574	100,450	100,192	154,700
Services	317,225	201,696	199,700	121,395	231,600
Capital	5,649	37,306	-	-	-
TOTAL	\$ 722,102	\$ 486,381	\$ 428,082	\$ 347,723	\$ 580,313

DEPARTMENT SUMMARY BY FUND					
FUND SUMMARY	2003 Actual	2004 Actual	2005 Original Appropriation	2005 Estimated Expenditures	2006 Proposed
General	\$ 11,856,906	\$ 11,719,710	\$ 12,124,156	\$ 11,946,105	\$ 13,159,872
Municipal Court Computer Fund	722,102	486,381	428,082	347,723	580,313
TOTAL	\$ 12,579,008	\$ 12,206,091	\$ 12,552,238	\$ 12,293,828	\$ 13,740,185

DEPARTMENT PERSONNEL SUMMARY					
DIVISION	FT/PT	2003 Actual	2004 Actual	2005 Authorized	2006 Authorized
Municipal Court Judges	FT	167	165	173	177
	PT	14	7	11	11
Computer Fund	FT	2	2	2	2
	PT	0	0	4	4
TOTAL		183	174	190	194
*FT=Full-Time PT=Part-Time					

Municipal Court Judges				
Program:	Administration		2005 Appropriated	2006 Budget
Program Mission:	To carry out non-judicial policies of the court including personnel management; fiscal management; purchasing; appointment of counsel for indigent defendants; liaison with other courts, governmental entities and private agencies; public information and report management; settlement week; secretarial services; and appointment of interpreters and security management.	Expenditures	\$ 3,903,010	\$ 4,472,776
		Full-Time	44	45
		Part-Time	7	7
Program:	Assignment			
Program Mission:	To control case flow management by making individual case assignments to judges; to prepare individual judges' and magistrates' court sheets and broadsheets; to notify plaintiffs, defendants, prosecutors, attorneys and suburban solicitors of all court hearings; to schedule and maintain an up-to-date status of all active cases assigned to the judges and magistrates; and process all motions and pleadings.	Expenditures	\$ 719,447	\$ 772,380
		Full-Time	14	14
		Part-Time	0	0
Program:	Service Bailiffs			
Program Mission:	To assist litigants and attorneys by efficiently handling and delivering court documents and the timely enforcement of judgment remedies.	Expenditures	\$ 1,046,544	\$ 1,077,779
		Full-Time	18	18
		Part-Time	0	0

Municipal Court Judges - continued				
Program:	Courtroom Bailiffs		2005	2006
			Appropriated	Budget
Program Mission:	To coordinate activities in the courtrooms of judges and magistrates including scheduling cases and providing information to the public regarding the status of pending cases.	Expenditures	\$ 1,583,509	\$ 1,580,594
		Full-Time	22	22
		Part-Time	0	0
Program:	Probation			
Program Mission:	To provide administration, regular supervision, non-reporting probation, domestic violence program, chemical abuse program, multiple OMVI offender program, sex offender program, investigation services, community service program, restitution program and provided no convictions program.	Expenditures	\$ 3,244,977	\$ 3,325,144
		Full-Time	54	54
		Part-Time	1	1
Program:	Small Claims			
Program Mission:	To provide citizens with a simplified procedure for bringing civil suits for sums of \$3,000 or less by providing forms and assistance to individuals wishing to file claims, motions and writs of execution.	Expenditures	\$ 259,104	\$ 305,887
		Full-Time	5	5
		Part-Time	1	1

Municipal Court Judges - continued

Program:	Court Reporters		2005	2006
			Appropriated	Budget
Program Mission:	To provide a verbatim record of all court proceedings, to read back any and all portions of court proceedings, to prepare verbatim transcripts of court proceedings and to maintain records on court exhibits.	Expenditures	\$ 1,003,372	\$ 1,005,718
		Full-Time	14	14
		Part-Time	2	2
Program:	Jury Office			
Program Mission:	To summon citizens to serve as jurors, randomly select jurors for panels, postpone and reschedule jury service, and maintain information on prospective jurors.	Expenditures	\$ 364,193	\$ 384,594
		Full-Time	2	2
		Part-Time	0	0
Program:	Home Incarceration/Work Release			
Program Mission:	To provide a cost-effective alternative sentencing option to traditional jail incarceration, consistent with public safety. To provide for the court's acquisition of software, technology-related equipment, internal technology billings and on-line services.	Expenditures	\$ -	\$ 235,000
		Full-Time	0	3
		Part-Time	0	0

Municipal Court Judges - continued				
Program:	Computer Services		2005	2006
			Appropriated	Budget
Program Mission:	To research and prepare memoranda of issues pending before the court; maintain the law library; review new case law to ensure the court's compliance with the decisions; review pending legislation that may affect the court; advise the judges and employees regarding new legal developments and applications of current law to court procedures; and update local court rules.	Expenditures	\$ 428,082	\$ 580,313
		Full-Time	0	2
		Part-Time	4	4
